

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 000142

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EU](#) [AU](#) [IR](#) [AF](#) [RU](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH FM PLASSNIK

REF: A. STATE 6236

[1](#)B. STATE 3627

Classified By: Ambassador Susan R. McCaw for reasons 1.4 (b)(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. During a cordial and lively first meeting with Ambassador McCaw, Foreign Minister Plassnik expressed her desire to continue the improved tenor of transatlantic relations during the Austrian EU Presidency. She pledged solidarity on Iran and Afghanistan, and agreed that the EU needed to give greater attention to its energy supply situation in view of recent Russian actions. Plassnik thought that differences between the U.S. and Europe over rendition flights and Guantanamo detainees were likely to continue, but she promised to approach those differences in a respectful and constructive manner. Ambassador was accompanied to the meeting by DCM (notetaker). End Summary.

-----  
IRAN  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) After Plassnik welcomed her warmly to Austria, Amb. McCaw raised the issue of Iran's provocative nuclear policy. Noting that U/S Burns was meeting the same day in London with other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, she stressed the importance of unreserved backing by the Austrian Presidency and the entire EU. Any sign of hesitation among EU members would only be exploited by the Iranian regime. (Plassnik was also provided a copy of Ref. A points on Iran.)

[1](#)3. (C) Plassnik replied that the EU3 had the full cooperation and trust of all member states. Noting that she was in close contact with IAEA DG El Baradei, the Minister said she had publicly expressed her disappointment and concern over Iran's actions, especially at a moment where international confidence in Iran was lacking. Plassnik said that FM Mottaki had called her directly within the last week, and that she had given him the same message: Iran had crossed a red line, and the entire EU was worried.

-----  
Russian Gas  
-----

[1](#)4. (C) Amb. McCaw told Plassnik that the U.S. was very concerned about the way Russia had used its control of natural gas supplies and transport routes to pressure neighboring states, especially Ukraine. We also doubted that the agreement reached between Russian and Ukraine would prove to be enduring and stable.

[1](#)5. (C) Plassnik recalled that this issue had erupted on Day One of the Austrian EU Presidency. Russian actions were of great concern to Austria directly because of its dependence on Russian gas deliveries; some other European states were even more dependent. The Austrian Presidency had been quick to react and express concern.

[1](#)6. (C) Plassnik said she did not have sufficient information to judge whether the Russia-Ukraine agreement was "solid" or not, but at least it had momentarily kept the crisis from boiling over. Clearly it would need to be watched. In this context, Plassnik thought that keeping discussions centered primarily with Energy Ministers had served the EU well and would continue to be the right approach. At the same time, the foreign policy dimension was obvious, as the prominence of the issue at the Jan. 11 meeting of U.S. and EU Political Directors had demonstrated.

[1](#)7. (C) Plassnik also confirmed that energy would be an important focus of the Austrian EU Presidency, including at the spring meeting of the European Council. She said she had to admit that a common EU policy in this area was "embryonic" and would require considerable work.

[1](#)8. (C) Amb. McCaw said the U.S. would fully support EU efforts to diversify its energy supply, but also remained very concerned about political dimensions of Russian actions.

-----  
Afghanistan  
-----

[1](#)9. (C) Turning to Afghanistan, the Ambassador stressed the importance of the upcoming London conference and asked for a

strong Austrian contribution. She also expressed U.S. appreciation for Austria's financial and personnel support for Afghanistan to date.

10 (C) Plassnik replied that Austria was very cognizant of the international effort needed in Afghanistan and has tried to make a meaningful contribution, financially and to ISAF. Deploying 100 Austrian soldiers to monitor elections had not been without controversy domestically, she noted.

11. (C) Plassnik also recalled the major conference last November on "Islam in a Pluralistic World," which had drawn President Karzai, President Talabani and many others to Vienna. Austria felt it could make a particular contribution in promoting dialogue between religions and between civilizations, and would continue to promote this during its EU Presidency. A May conference in Vienna on Imams would be a cornerstone of this effort, and Plassnik said she had already engaged the new Turkish Ambassador to Austria on the event.

-----  
Transatlantic Relations  
-----

12. (C) Plassnik stated that she wanted to make transatlantic relations a central element of the Austrian EU Presidency. The effort President Bush and Secretary Rice had made to reach out to Europe during the past year was recognized and appreciated. Austria wanted to continue that trend throughout its six month term, and felt moving forward with both a meeting of Foreign Ministers and a US-EU Summit would be especially important to maintaining momentum. Regarding the latter, Plassnik said she supported a practical approach that produced one or two important, concrete results, rather than reams of documents.

13. (C) Plassnik argued that there had been far too much focus on the perceived negatives in transatlantic relations, often fed by European media. The Minister said she would refuse to join in that game. We needed instead to highlight the many common values we shared and areas where we could work together. The Balkans was clearly one such area; the Middle East was another. (Plassnik expressed satisfaction with last week's quartet conference call, and was preparing for a follow-up discussion in London on January 30.) The Ambassador warmly welcomed this approach.

-----  
Rendition Flights, Guantanamo  
-----

14. (C) Along with the above, however, Plassnik cautioned that differences of opinion between the United States and Europe inevitably would occur during the next six months, and that Austria, as EU President, would sometimes have to express positions at odds with U.S. policy. Two such areas, she predicted, would be CIA rendition flights and treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo. "These issues are not going to go away, and we will have to discuss them" in the context of ongoing European investigations, said Plassnik. She quickly added, however, that she wanted the tone of those discussions to be respectful and constructive, citing German Chancellor Merkel's recent talks at the White House as an example to be followed. "What we hope for," Plassnik summed up, "is clarification on what actually happened (regarding rendition flights) and agreement on how such cases will be handled in the future."

15. (C) Amb. McCaw said that the Secretary had tried hard to address EU concerns. The United States did not torture or condone a policy of torture anywhere or at any time. European governments needed to remember they had a responsibility to protect their own citizens and that intelligence cooperation with the U.S. has greatly assisted in that effort.

-----  
Reframing a European Identity  
-----

16. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's question about Austria's efforts stimulate a debate over Europe's identity during its EU Presidency, Plassnik said that she wanted to help frame the debate in a new way and to help Europeans (including Austrians) feel more comfortably with a growing European identity. Just as the U.S. had successfully created a "positive and inclusive" sense of the American way of life, so Europe should do the same thing. "There is a European way of life," Plassnik argued, "which includes a competitive economy, very high social protections, and solidarity between generations (i.e. good pensions). We can take pride in this and rally around it." Recognition of this common European way of life, Plassnik hoped, would lead to a new sense of compromise and cooperation with the EU.

MCCAW